

Executive Summary and Authorized Officer's Determination For the Medicine Lodge Watershed Assessment

Bureau of Land Management
Dillon Field Office

This document summarizes the findings of the Medicine Lodge Watershed Assessment (MLW) conducted during the 2011 field season. The watershed includes 16 grazing allotments (39,039 acres) and about 1,609 acres of un-allotted public land administered by the BLM's Dillon Field Office.

The *Medicine Lodge Watershed Assessment Report* describes the existing condition of BLM administered lands within the watershed. The assessment also presents management and project recommendations for improving resource conditions where needed. Please refer to the report for a complete discussion of resource conditions, concerns and management opportunities.

In January, 2012, the BLM will begin National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation. The NEPA document will include all BLM-administered public lands covered in the Medicine Lodge Assessment. Alternative management will be analyzed wherever it is determined that allotments are not meeting the Standards, allotments are meeting the Standards but have site specific resource concerns, there are noxious weed infestations, unhealthy forest conditions, and/or fuels conditions outside the natural range of variability.

The issue of scope and scale must be kept in mind in evaluating each standard. It is recognized that isolated sites within a landscape may not be meeting the standards; however, considering broader scope and scale, the area may be in proper functioning condition. No single indicator provides sufficient information to determine rangeland health; they are used in combination to provide information necessary to determine rangeland health. Alternatively, just because a standard is being met does not mean that the conditions on the ground represent desired resource condition or objectives. For example an upland site with reduced composition of bunchgrasses may meet the upland health standard if it sustains a native plant community, even if it is dominated by low producing, low palatability grasses, shrubs and or forbs. While such a site may have stable soils and allow for proper hydrologic function, it won't provide the livestock forage or wildlife cover that it would if it was dominated by taller, more palatable plants.

In addition, every riparian reach or acre of upland habitat does not need to be rated as PFC for the allotment to meet standards. The scope of the resource being assessed and relative importance of riparian/wetland habitat or upland sites within the context of the allotment as a whole is considered to determine if the allotment is meeting standards or not. For example, if an allotment has 15 miles of riparian habitat and 13 miles habitat is functioning properly while 2 miles is functioning at risk, the relative importance of the two miles that is functioning at risk is considered in making an overall determination of meeting the riparian health standard or not. If the two miles of stream at risk has fisheries habitat or is contributing to water quality impairment, the allotment would not meet the riparian health standard. However, if the two

miles of stream functioning at risk are low energy, isolated intermittent reaches or spring brooks, not hydrologically connected to larger bodies of water, the allotment as a whole may meet the riparian health standard and these isolated reaches will be addressed as site specific resource concerns.

The table below summarizes the determination of rangeland health standards by allotment. It also briefly describes the significant factors identified by the interdisciplinary team (IDT) on allotments where one or more of the Standards are not in compliance.

Allotment Name, Number, & BLM Acres	Are Healthy Rangelands Standards Being Met?					Factors in Failing to Achieve Standards
	Upland	Riparian Wetland	Water Quality	Air Quality	Bio- diversity	
Dad Creek #00758 Acres: 1991	Yes	Yes	1, No ²	Yes	Yes	Medicine Lodge Creek (MLC) reach 764, was rated PFC. BLM management is not contributing to MLC's impairment.
Dad Creek Isolated #00764 Acres: 13	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	None
Ellis Peak #10126 Acres: 3252	Yes	Yes	1	Yes	Yes	None
Hansen Creek #20108 Acres: 5177	Yes	No	1	Yes	Yes	Impacts to riparian areas by cattle. Conifer encroachment.
Hansen East Side #30044 Acres: 8792	Yes	Yes	1	Yes	Yes	None
Hildreth Livestock #10127 Acres: 304	Yes	Yes	No ²	Yes	Yes	Medicine Lodge Creek (MLC) reach 755, was rated PFC. BLM management is not contributing to MLC's impairment.
Kate Creek FS #10749 Acres: 430	Yes	Yes	1	Yes	Yes	None
Little Divide #30101 Acres: 5511	Yes	Yes	1	Yes	Yes	None
Medicine Lodge #10748 Acres: 9057	Yes	No	1	Yes	Yes	Impacts to riparian areas by cattle. Conifer encroachment.

Allotment Name, Number, & BLM Acres	Are Healthy Rangelands Standards Being Met?					Factors in Failing to Achieve Standards
	Upland	Riparian Wetland	Water Quality	Air Quality	Bio-diversity	
Medicine Lodge Tract #20613 Acres: 303	Yes	Yes	No ²	Yes	Yes	Medicine Lodge Creek (MLC) reach 787 was rated PFC. BLM management is not contributing to MLC's impairment.
Morrison Creek #20621 Acres: 567	Yes	Yes	1	Yes	Yes	None
Pass Creek #10119 Acres: 2291	Yes	No	1	Yes	No	Impacts to riparian areas by cattle. Impacts to sensitive plant habitat.
Pass Creek Isolated #30692 Acres: 90	Yes	No	No ²	Yes	Yes	Medicine Lodge Creek (MLC) reach 728 was rated FAR Static. BLM management is contributing to MLC's impairment. Tire bridges and debris along reach #728.
Porcupine #30100 Acres: 733	Yes	No	1	Yes	Yes	Impacts to riparian areas by cattle.
Rife Meadows #20653 Acres: 312	Yes	No	No ²	Yes	Yes	Medicine Lodge Creek (MLC) reach 766 was rated FAR Static. BLM management is contributing to MLC's impairment. Irrigation diversions.
Tepee Mountain #03262 Acres: 300	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	None
¹ Tributary streams in the MLW are not on the 303(d) list, are not priority streams, and are not scheduled to be evaluated by the DEQ. ² The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has the responsibility for making water quality determinations and has completed its evaluation of 303(d)-listed streams. Medicine Lodge Creek flows through BLM administered land, has been evaluated by Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and beneficial use support determinations have been completed. Medicine Lodge Creek does not meet several Beneficial Uses and TMDLs are required. Probable sources include grazing and irrigation. Probable causes include water temperature, phosphorous,						

Authorized Officer's Determination

Based on my review of the *Medicine Lodge Watershed Assessment Report*, the interdisciplinary team's recommendations and other relevant data and information, I have determined that the following 9 allotments and all the un-allotted and un-leased parcels of BLM administered land in the MLW **meet** all five Standards for Rangeland Health and conform to the eleven guidelines for livestock grazing management established for BLM lands in Western Montana.

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|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Hansen East Side | 2. Dad Creek Isolated | 3. Ellis Peak |
| 4. Kate Creek FS | 5. Little Divide | 6. Morrison Creek |
| 7. Tepee Mountain | 8. Hildreth Livestock | 9. Dad Creek |

I have determined that the following 6 allotments **do not meet** one or more of the Standards for Rangeland Health. I have also determined that current livestock management is a significant contributing factor in these standards not being met.

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|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Hansen Creek | 2. Medicine Lodge | 3. Pass Creek |
| 4. Pass Creek Isolated | 5. Porcupine | 6. Rife Meadows |

In addition, I have determined that the following allotment **does not meet one** or more of the Standards for Rangeland Health. I have also determined that current livestock management is **not** a significant causal factor in failing to meet the Standard.

1. Medicine Lodge Tract

Pursuant to 43 CFR 4180.2(c), the authorized officer shall take appropriate action as soon as practicable but not later than the start of the next grazing year upon determining that existing grazing management practices or levels of grazing use on public lands are significant factors in failing to achieve the standards and conform with the guidelines that are made effective under this section. Appropriate action means implementing actions that will result in significant progress toward fulfillment of the standards and significant progress toward conformance with the guidelines. Practices and activities subject to standards and guidelines include the development of grazing-related portions of activity plans, establishment of terms and conditions of permits, leases and other grazing authorizations, and range improvement activities such as vegetation manipulation, fence construction and development of water.

An environmental assessment which will propose and analyze management alternatives necessary to address or correct identified resource concerns will be prepared in early 2012.

Authorized Officer's Signature:

Signature: _____
Dillon Field Manager

Date: _____